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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR C CHERYL MILLS, SCA  
DEPT PASS TO USAID FOR RAJIV SHAH

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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [KPAO](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: BANGLADESH: AN IDEAL FEED THE FUTURE FOCUS COUNTRY

REF: DHAKA 26

SUMMARY

1. Bangladesh is an ideal candidate to serve as the Asian focus country for the USG's Feed the Future (FTF) Initiative. This Muslim majority nation of more than 150 million people, where poverty and malnutrition rates remain high, places a very high priority on ensuring food security. The effects of global climate change on agriculture will further compound the food security challenges here. Food security in Bangladesh also has implications for the stability of South Asia and the United States. Despite many obstacles, Bangladesh has made major strides to improve food security since independence, achieving near self-sufficiency in rice production. An FTF program in Bangladesh has a high probability of success, given the will of the Government of Bangladesh and existing USG programs.

THE NEEDS ARE GREAT

2. Tens of millions of people in Bangladesh are chronically food insecure. According to the World Bank, roughly 40 million Bangladeshis live in extreme poverty while malnutrition affects nearly 40 percent of Bangladeshi children under 5 years old. Most Bangladeshis live on an economic precipice.

3. Bangladesh's agriculture and food security also face some of the harshest effects of global climate change. As a low-lying coastal country which serves as the delta for three major river systems, Bangladesh is vulnerable to increasingly frequent and severe tropical cyclones which affect agriculture. The cyclones contribute to rising salinity of soil and water which affects agriculture and food security in sizable areas of southwestern Bangladesh.

ADVANCING U.S. SECURITY INTERESTS

4. These food security challenges have major political and stability ramifications. The Government of Bangladesh (GOB), regardless of the political party in power, must constantly monitor for imminent major threats to food supplies or accessibility. The GOB, as a matter of political survival, continually strives to improve the food security and economic well-being of its citizens. Food security programs can also contribute to enhanced regional cooperation. After the Prime Minister's recent visit to India, the two countries are looking at food security as a key area for enhanced bilateral cooperation. By fostering this trend, our food security program will pay dividends across a wide range of issues, including U.S. national security priorities.

5. Studies conducted by the USG and others directly link economic security to vulnerability to extremism. Most Bangladeshis only turn to extremism in the absence of legitimate economic opportunities.

The current GOB is committed to stopping terrorism and extremism within its borders and to working with the United States, India and others to combat transnational terrorism. We need to give them all possible tools to reduce this threat.

#### BUILDING ON EXISTING PROGRAMS

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¶6. The need for expanded food security programs is matched by Bangladesh's commitment to feed its population. The GOB has recently conducted several analyses of food security and identifies it as the top priority of the government. The government has developed a country-led food policy and plan of action that will serve as the basis for Feed the Future programs. Bangladesh has a long history of progress on food security. While its population has doubled since independence, Bangladesh went from importing half the food it was consuming in the 1970's to virtual self-sufficiency in rice today. Moreover, although chronic malnutrition remains widespread, the GOB, with USG support, has developed safety net programs that now prevent a recurrence of the mass starvation of the 1970's.

¶7. Furthermore, the USG already has a range of programs underway in Bangladesh that address food security, including in the areas of agriculture, nutrition and climate change. We are well-positioned to build on and expand these programs to support the GOB in its efforts to make a momentous leap forward on food security. We created an Embassy-wide food security task force last year to utilize the distinct strengths of State, USAID, DOD and USDA offices and apply the whole-of-government approach in preparing our food security proposal (reftel).

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#### COMMENT

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¶8. This environment bodes well for creating a successful Feed the Future program. Given the long-term nature of this challenge, it is in our interest to focus the initiative in countries where we have the maximum chances for success. If we truly want to effect meaningful change to the problem of hunger, we need to create partnerships with strong candidate countries. Bangladesh is clearly one of those countries.

MORIARTY